

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

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CRAWFORD LEADS NATIONAL CHARGE TO HELP LOW INCOME FAMILIES WITH UTILITY COSTS

INDIANAPOLIS – State Rep. William Crawford (D-Indianapolis) and the Indiana Black Legislative Caucus (IBLC) are playing a prominent role in a national effort to improve funding for programs designed to help people on lower incomes pay their utility bills.

On behalf of the IBLC, Crawford co-sponsored a resolution approved by the executive committee of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) that urges the federal government to provide additional funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). The committee's action came at a recent meeting in Seattle, Washington, held in conjunction with the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL).

"The resolution seeks two things from our federal government," Crawford said. "First, we are asking that Washington release \$50 million in emergency relief that is currently being held back. Second, we want Congress to appropriate \$5.1 billion in LIHEAP funding for the 2006 fiscal year. Both of these moves are needed to ensure that we provide energy security for working poor, the elderly and disabled Americans."

LIHEAP is designed to help qualified low income citizens meet their utility bill payment obligations, as well as minimize loss of service, enable households to avoid greater reliance on other government services, and accelerate the transition to economic self-reliance. The program advances efforts at energy efficiency by promoting the weatherization of homes, repairs to defective heating equipment and reductions in energy usage.

"Program officials report that applications for energy assistance have increased by more than 5 percent, and that more than 5 million households were compelled to seek LIHEAP assistance, the first time that figure has been reached in more than a decade," Crawford said. "What is needed is the assurance that the program will be funded at levels that can ensure continued quality of service for people who need heating and cooling assistance."

Crawford noted that severely constrained state budgets, unprecedented poverty and rising energy prices are overwhelming the capabilities of many faith, non-profit, voluntary and other community-based organizations to satisfactorily help citizens heat and cool their homes.

"LIHEAP already has demonstrated its impact on helping citizens," he said. "A national survey conducted in 2003 found that the program enabled more than 60 percent of eligible families to restore utility services, more than 50 percent of LIHEAP households to subsist at safe and healthy temperatures and nearly half of the recipients to avoid having services disconnected.

"All indications are that home energy costs are on the rise, which means there is a greater likelihood that our seniors, the disabled and working people on lower incomes will have more difficulty in paying their bills," Crawford said. "We do not believe that people should be forced into cutting food, medicine and other basic necessities, simply in order to warm or cool their homes. People should not have to choose between heating and eating. LIHEAP can help, and we feel it is the federal government's duty to fund this program at levels that make sure people get the assistance they deserve."

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